Zoot Suit Worksheet

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1. Describe the *stasis* in the play: where, when, who, what, etc. in a paragraph.

This play is set in Los Angeles, California during the 1940s in the midst of WWII. Henry and his friends are on trial for the murder of a Mexican-American man in the Sleepy Lagoon area.

2. What is the *intrusion*?

El Pachuco’s entrance, with his knife, as he details the rising tension within the community.

3. What is the *unique factor*?

This is day that El Pachuco explains the height of the racial tensions and the rise of the Zoot Suit trend along with the developments of the Sleepy Lagoon case.

4. What is the *dramatic question* that should be answered by the end of the play?

What will Henry Reya’s fate be? (This question is not directly answered by the play, but rather the audience gets to decide the ending)

5. Identify the most *theatrical moment* in the play and of what importance it seems to be.

The most theatrical moment of this play was the argument between Henry and his brother, as the brother gets very emotional. He details how he was beaten and stripped of his clothes, representing the stripping away of everything he identifies himself with. This scene really brings to light how Mexican-Americans felt not only physically attacked but also felt that their very identities are being attacked.

6. List some of the *themes* of the play.

Race, Prejudice, Discrimination, dress/fashion with identity.

7. What does Henry want? How does the playwright resolve his wants at the end of the play? How does this resolution compare with the real Henry, as indicated in the documentary?

Henry ultimately wants justice, but knows the realities of the legal system. The playwright does not resolve all of Henry’s struggles at the end of the play, but he does receive justice as he is released from prison. We are led to believe that Henry may be able to achieve some sort of happy ending, but looking at the real Henry from the documentary, it is probably more likely that he continued his life in and out of jail, toying with drugs and small crime.

8. Note which version of the play in production you saw (either the DVD version or the HS stage version), then discuss the way the designers move from place to place (scene to scene) and how effectively that is for communicating the dramatic action.

I watched the HS Stage Production. The scene transitions had no unique aspects, and were mostly functional in their design. The designers moved from scene to scene by mostly adding set pieces throughout the scene changes. In regards to communicating the dramatic action, it was a little confusing at times to keep up with the shifting of the scenes.

9. Choose a character from the play and discuss how the costume designer has accentuated (focused) the audience attention on that character. What are some of the details of the costume that strike you as interesting or exaggerated.

El Pachuco was always dressed in red and black, with his strong, bold mustache. The red and black definitely references classic Hispanic machismo values, with an emphasis on power and strength. Because of this, he seems to really represent Mexican-American culture and roots, an all-knowing figure of the past that still connects with the present. He is the most bold character of the show, and his costume equally reflects this.

10. Lighting plays a big role in the DVD and the staged version by the HS. Discuss the use of light to accentuate characters and scenes, choosing a particular scene from the production to discuss.

Because this was a high school production, the lighting techniques were quite limited. Fading was used quite often, blending the scenes and reducing choppiness within the show. Using light to focus on certain areas of the stage was also used frequently, to keep the audience focused on certain aspects of the stage, accentuating important lines and action.